

Willie Blount to Andrew Jackson, March 22, 1812, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

WILLIE BLOUNT TO JACKSON.

Knoxville, March 22, 1812.

Dear Sir , The foregoing is a copy of my letter to the Secy War, sent for your perusal—the full details in yours to me seemed to supercede the necessity of saying more.¹

¹ This letter was a protest against Silas Dinsmore, agent to the Choctaw Indians. He had undertaken to require persons taking slaves through that Nation to show certificates of ownership. As the main road from New Orleans to Nashville ran through the Nation, many people were stopped, with their slaves, at the agency house. Complaints were loud. Jackson undertook to suppress Dinsmore's new rules, which he thought illegal and tyrannical. Parton's *Jackson*, I. 349–360, contains much on this subject, to which that biographer gave too much prominence. Blount's letter to the secretary of war, mentioned by the governor, is as follows:

“Sir, I have the honor to forward to you a copy of Major General Andrew Jackson's letter of the 25th. Jany last, to me, representing in firm manly language, the conduct of the Agent of the United States resident in the Choctaw Nation towards him, shortly before the date of his letter; and the copy of two other letters, the one from Mr. John Miller, the other from Mr. George McCleskey, of the 2d. Jany, and 15th. March, in the present year, to Genl. Jackson, corroborating the General's statement of the ill-treatment he experienced from said Agent, on the public road, leading from Nashville to Natchez and back.

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“It is understood that such oppressive conduct is not sanctioned by the General Government, and the belief is entertained, that they will inquire into and redress the wrongs, and also take such measures as will lead to the entire security of such Citizens of the United States as may travel that road in future, checking effectually all such oppressive conduct; otherwise, it is fair to presume that those Citizens may, under the plea of necessity, feel themselves bound to do, what they now hope the Government will cheerfully do for their relief, after being advised of the almost daily violation of their rights, and infringement of their privileges, secured by Treaty.

“It is understood that the Agent declares he knows not how to discriminate between the fair and suspicious character of travellers on that road, and therefore enforces the most rigid rule against good and bad men—we suppose here that we have the same right to travel that road unmolested, without a pass, that free citizens have and exercise at Washington, whilst passing along the streets attending to their laudable business, as well as the right to remove unlawful nuisances operating to our hindrance in the execution thereof; and it is the desire of Government that we should be entitled to do so, I have no doubt. The frequent violations of the rights of American citizens practised on that road, in the way now complained of, has been the subject of complaint for many years, and they have been repeatedly represented to Government by the regularly constituted authorities of the States of Kentucky and Tennessee, the citizens of which states, do by thousands, of necessity use that road as the best in their power when attending to their lawful and laudable business; and to those who know of the frequent acts of oppression exercised towards many of them, tho' not permitted by Government, their forbearance has been more a matter of surprize than otherwise—it is only to be accounted for from the belief that Government will when informed remove the causes which lead to the practice of such, and take effectual measures to guard against a repetition, by the better ordering of them in future, under such impressions, forbearance to a certain extent is commendable, but it is well known, that forbearance, under oppression, beyond a certain point, known to all reasonable men, ceases to be a virtue, and deserves another name, which men of

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independent minds do not admire, it is not uncommon for travellers on that road to be detained for the want of passports, which should not be exacted, until they can send, or go, several hundred miles to get them—many who take passports have to travel, or to send, several hundred miles to obtain them, before starting on that journey, which creates great and injurious delays in their business. As Genl. Jackson's letter is so much in detail on this subject to say more would seem unnecessary.”

Since writing you last have read your truly patriotic and able address preparatory to your Division Orders—those who have feelings and love of country about them will shoulder firelock and wish for an opportunity to march. I am unadvised what course Government will pursue in relation to giving an intimation of the wish of the Government as to the manner of raising those Volunteers, it would seem they ought to give certain intimations in the nature of general instructions or rules to be uniformly observed by the Militia of the different states, this is mere conjecture but I have hitherto expected some such course to be pursued which is the reason and the only one why I have said so little about the subject—if this is your way of thinking do you or do you not think it would be well to wait a while after your men are ready before making the formal tender of service?—if Government should take any such or other step perhaps they would expect a strict compliance with such general rule.